

VLR-12/11/84

NRHP-2/27/85

PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN AUGUSTA COUNTY, VIRGINIA, 1870-1940
 VIRGINIA HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION
 Thematic National Register Nomination Inventory Form

Historic Name: Mt. Sidney School
 Street Address/Rt. No.: Rt. 11
 Vicinity of: Mt. Sidney
 USGS Quad: Mt. Sidney 7.5

Common Name: Mt. Sidney School
 VHLC File Number: 07-1155
 Owner: Frank Swink
 Rt. 4, Staunton, VA

Date(s): 1912, 1921
 Original Use: Elementary & High School
 Present Use: Apartments
 Condition: Good
 Altered X; unaltered

Architect/Builder: Charles Fretwell
 Style: Vernacular

Physical Description:

The Mt. Sidney School displays the domestic forms adopted by some of the larger graded school designs in the early twentieth century. Built in two parts, the original portion is the front gable-roofed, two-story block. Mt. Sidney School is one of several documented four-room schools in Augusta County to follow the familiar I-house plan with two rooms and a central hallway on each floor. The balanced, symmetrical facade, central cross gable, one-story, three-bay porch, transom-lighted entrance, and interior axial chimneys are all characteristics of this popular nineteenth-century house plan. Several features do, however, suggest a non-domestic use of this building, particularly its large scale with additional lighting provided by a seven-, rather than three- or five-, bay facade, and by four-bay end walls; the larger double-door entry, and a symbolic wooden belfry. While the other documented examples of this school are of frame construction, the Mt. Sidney School is laid in stretcher bond brick, no doubt helping to insure its survival. The walls are embellished by round-arched windows and underpinned with concrete.

Seven years after the construction of the four-room school, it was doubled in size with a four-room brick addition. The addition again assumed a domestic character, resembling the ells usually attached to I-houses. Also of stretcher bond construction, the addition created a double-pile plan with the central hallway continued through the building, again with round-arched lintels. Four sash light each classroom on the side walls of the additions.

As one of the earliest schools built before the State Department of Education began actively distributing school plan suggestions, the Mt. Sidney School did not originally have a gymnasium. In 1935, a brick veneer gymnasium with five-course American bond veneer was added behind the addition. The brick buttresses are similar to other gymnasium additions such as the one at Weyers Cave. This large room retains its wooden floor and yellow glazed tile wainscoting typical of the period. In the 1940s, a basement was excavated for a kitchen and cafeteria.

(continued)

Statement of Significance:

The Mt. Sidney School is the only surviving example of the first stage of consolidated school buildings in Augusta County from 1900-15. As larger school buildings became necessary, the first forms mirrored the vernacular designs found in domestic buildings--namely, the familiar I-house plan. Although slightly larger than the I-house examples, the new school buildings retained the characteristic gable roofs, cross gables, one-story porches, and balanced facades. The larger scale and especially the belfry indicate the educational use of these buildings. Most of the documented examples of this form were of frame construction and either burned or were razed, but the Mt. Sidney School is the only documented brick example. Although more remodeled on the exterior than the other nominated resources of this class, the Mt. Sidney School remains as an important link between the smaller one-, two-, and three-room schools and the larger consolidated schools of the late 1910s and 1920s.

An early turnpike town along the Valley Turnpike, the community of Mt. Sidney prospered throughout the nineteenth century with its rich agricultural farmlands. Like many of Augusta County's towns at the turn of the century, Mt. Sidney built a new, more substantial school in 1914, replacing a smaller frame building. Charles Fretwell from Staunton received the contract for the construction of this building, using largely county money. The Mt. Sidney Patrons League did donate much of the labor for the building, and local residents recall that their parents provided assistance in digging foundations and doing other jobs. The original four-

(continued)

Geographic Data/Acreage: one acre

Verbal Boundary Description: Beginning at a point on S side of school access road approx. 800' WSW of intersection of US 11 with VA 626 thence extending approx. 200' WNW along (continued)
 Boundary Justification: The bounds have been drawn to include the school and the immediate school yard.

UTM: 17/678290/4235950

Prepared By: Ann McCleary, Architectural Historian

Date Prepared: September 1984

Physical Description continued

After the school closed in 1967, the building was sold and remodeled into apartments. The exterior has been altered, largely in the fenestration. Several windows on the sides have been bricked in, and all the windows have been bricked in at the top, reflecting lower ceilings inside. However, the original fenestration pattern and round brick arches are clearly visible. The porch, front doors, and cross gable have been retained, but the belfry was removed. Inside, the central passage remains as it was when used as a school, along with the original single-run stairwell, with massive square newel post and square balusters. Wood floors, plastered walls, and Colonial Revival door trim remain in the hallway. The classrooms have been remodeled, creating one apartment in each room. Some woodwork has been preserved along with wood floors.

The gymnasium remains and has not been remodeled or altered. A frame classroom addition, erected in the 1940s, has been razed.

Statement of Significance continued

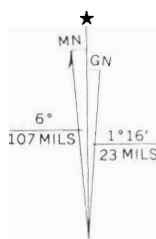
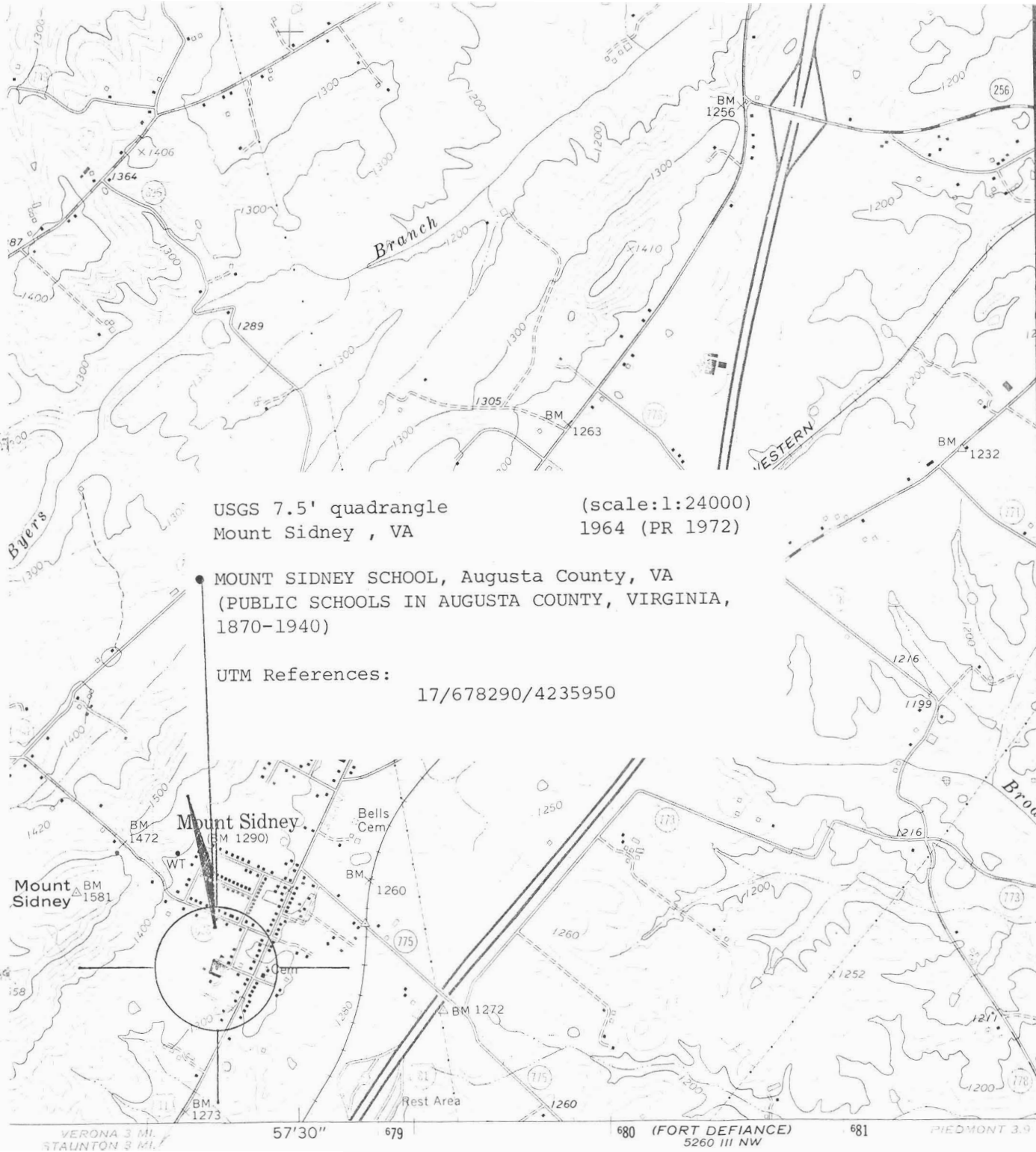
room building housed grades one through seven and one year of high school. Minor C. Miller of Bridgewater served as the first principal.

The building quickly became too small for the growing student population. Harry Myers recalls that in the late 1910s the seventh graders met in the back part of the hall because there was no other space. The building was subsequently enlarged in 1921, increasing the size to eight rooms. With the addition, the grades were moved downstairs and the high school upstairs. The additional rooms did provide space for more specialized classes, including agriculture and home economics. However, Mt. Sidney did not adopt vocational programs as quickly and eagerly as the nearby Weyers Cave School. School programs continued to expand in spite of the space restrictions. By 1949, a cafeteria and kitchen had been created in the newly-excavated basement, a detached library and typing classroom had been built, and an auditorium/gymnasium had been constructed off the addition.

However, Mt. Sidney could not continue to compete with some of the more progressive small high schools in the North River District. State officials complained that there were too many small high schools draining education funds from elementary schools around the State. By the 1930s and 1940s, Augusta County began to consolidate its smaller high schools. In the 1930s, the County took some Mt. Sidney high school students by hack to the Weyers Cave High School, which had a more expanded program. In the early 1950s, Mt. Sidney's high school students were permanently moved to Weyers Cave and a new consolidated high school called Middle River High School was created. Mt. Sidney became an elementary school with grades one through seven which operated until the students were moved to the new Verona Elementary School in 1967.

Verbal Boundary Description continued

S side of school access road; thence approx. 200' SSW; thence approx. 200' SE; thence approx. 200' NNE to point of origin.



UTM GRID AND 1972 MAGNETIC NORTH
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
AND VIRGINIA DIVISION OF MINERAL RESOURCES, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST